



HealthAdvocateSM

member newsletter

How to get—and stay—heart-healthy

About half of the U.S. population has at least one key risk factor for heart disease, including obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking. However, there are a number of steps you can take to reduce your risk and improve your heart health.

See your doctor for a check-up. They can help identify conditions that could potentially lead to issues, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol. By identifying these issues early, it is possible to manage them effectively and avoid more complicated problems later on.

Eat a nutritious, balanced diet. By incorporating more healthy foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains into your diet, it's possible to improve the factors that can lead to heart disease. In addition, focus on fresh foods and try to avoid foods high in sodium and saturated fat.

Be active. Exercising regularly can help you lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, which can help reduce some of the risk factors for heart disease. Aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity exercise to get the most benefit, and try to incorporate both cardiovascular and strength training exercise, which can help increase your levels of good cholesterol.

Quit tobacco. Smoking greatly increases your risk for developing heart disease, and even exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of heart disease. Talk to your doctor about options to help you quit smoking; it can help improve your health as well as the health of others around you.

Stress can impact your heart

Excessive stress can contribute to many diseases, such as hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, and more. It may prompt certain unhealthy behaviors that increase the risk of heart disease, such as drinking alcohol, overeating, or smoking cigarettes to manage stress. Read on to learn simple strategies to help you keep stress in check!

Practice positive self-talk. Remind yourself that you're doing enough, you don't have to be perfect, and that you can do it!

Get enough sleep. Sleep can affect your mood, problem-solving and decision-making, energy level, and physical health.

Find a relaxation technique. Things like mindfulness meditation, Tai Chi, yoga, or deep breathing can all help you feel calmer.

Improve your time management skills. They can help you balance your work and/or family demands better.

Don't let stress build up. If there's a situation you're feeling stressed about, confront it head-on.

Connect with family and friends. Having a good support system



to talk through issues with, or simply spend time having fun together, can help you stress less.

Are stress management techniques not working for you?

Consider reaching out to your primary care provider and/or a mental health professional. They can help evaluate your stress level, address the impact of stress on your health, and suggest additional ways—including lifestyle changes, medication, and more—to reduce your stress.



Strengthen your resilience

Everyone faces disappointments and hardships at one time or another. Strengthening your resilience enables you to better handle setbacks, overcome adversity, adapt to change and maintain a “never give up attitude.” Try these tips to strengthen your resilience:

Pursue a calming activity. Whether it's exercise, meditation, reading, working on a hobby, or just hanging out in nature, engaging in an activity that helps calm your body and mind fosters a sense of control.

Learn to be a rational, problem solver. Thinking through problems without getting your emotions too involved can help you identify a sound solution.

Be proactive, not reactive. Recognize when trouble may be ahead, and address it before it becomes an overwhelming problem.

View setbacks as speed bumps, not roadblocks. Remind yourself that life is unpredictable, not perfect, and you may need to adjust your goals or timelines.

Look at the big picture. Jotting down all your personal strengths as well as the positive things and people you are grateful for can help you feel confident, optimistic and energized to move ahead.

Know when to seek additional help. Accepting that you cannot always deal with a stressful situation on your own is critical to building resilience.



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Heart Health Awareness Month

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